

DISCUSSIONS AFTER THE CREATIVE ECONOMY SEMINAR

The rural creative economy: Issues and challenges

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Seminar Abstract

The idea of a “Creative Economy” and related research have primarily been focused on urban or at least suburban areas. Richard Florida’s original research and much of the subsequent work of other researchers have only looked at metropolitan regions. The idea of attracting the creative class has come to be synonymous with an urban lifestyle and amenities. However, researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (McGranahan and Wojan) and others have found that the creative class plays an equally important role in the economic development and success of rural and non-urban regions, and that these locations can offer a different collection of amenities that can be equally attractive to a subset of the Creative Class. The Creative Class is not monolithic. Variation in individual and family preferences results in variability in the ability to attract the creative, highly-skilled individuals needed for regional prosperity. In this talk, examples from Europe, the United States, and northern Canada will be used to discuss the development of appropriate regional strategies.

Key Discussion Points

- It is very difficult to obtain reliable measures of creative economy activity. There are hidden members of the creative class in rural areas – they just are not counted as such. Take for example the farmer who crafts a replacement part in her machine shop. She is being creative, but under Stats Canada occupations, she is counted as a farmer, not a machinist.
- To get above the “average” creative class presence, it is important to have above average regional Talent, Technology or Tolerance (the 3Ts). It is important to push to get above the line in one of the Ts. Growth in the other two will naturally follow.
A region’s amenities (Territorial assets – a 4th T) are important in attracting firms that employ the creative class. A study of 145 IT small and medium-sized enterprises found amenities were the most important reason firms located to an area.
- Regions should tap into people who are already attracted to the area. For example, Aberdeen, South Dakota, famous for quail hunting, placed post cards in hotel rooms saying, “you like to hunt here; would you like to do business here?” There were 500 responses. Respondents were paired with people from Aberdeen with similar business interests.
- Increasing a region’s creative class has downsides.
 - In-migration of members of the creative class can cause divisions with long term community residents. The Tolerance factor is not always there.
 - There can be differences in wage levels. There may be more lower end service jobs and higher end creative class jobs.
 - The challenge is improving the creativity of the lower end service workers.
- Some members of the creative class leave one region for another because the infrastructure that serves their creativity is not found in their own region. Regions can reduce the exodus by making sure the infrastructure (e.g., broadband) is in place.
- Immigration is the key to Kingston’s growth – the hardest thing for small communities is attracting the first immigrant; it is much easier to attract the second. Schenectady, NY, provides a good example of how this can be addressed. There, members of an immigrant group (Guyanese) took the initiative to go to nearby Brooklyn to invite members of the same immigrant group to see what Schenectady had to offer. Regular bus transportation between Brooklyn and Schenectady was provided for members of the immigrant community. The response was very positive. The key is to focus on a single group.
- Regions should focus on both their creative economy sectors and location – use a shotgun approach, try different methods and see which ones work.